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ABSTRACT

An extrinsic relationship between generative semantics and dialect geography should be exploited because contemporary transformational grammarians have too easily ignored the work of the dialectologist and have been too readily satisfied with what might be called armchair evidence. The work of the dialect geographers needs to be taken into account. The "Linguistic Atlas of New England" cites several examples of varying constructions which have the same meaning, e.g., 23 synonymous expressions for, "He died." Another type of problematic structure unearthed by dialect geographers is that in which a single surface representation has two possible semantic interpretations, such as, "He takes after his father." There are also many cases of synonymity or partial synonymity that dialect geographers have discovered, such as the way informants distinguish "stone" from "rock." In some instances, evidence shows informants not distinguishing words in meaning but in use as in the difference between "sunset" and "sundown." The differing linguistic phenomena described by dialectologists will have to be considered by generative semanticists in their analysis of English. (HOD)

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Generative Semantics and Dialect Geography

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In his 1957 work, Syntactic Structures, the work that launched the field of transformational grammar, Noam Chomsky maintained the independence of grammar in a chapter by that title. In maintaining this, he was asserting the feasibility of the autonomous syntax position which assumes that the grammar of a language can be described essentially without describing the semantic structuring of a language. By doing this, Chomsky was obviously following in the footsteps of his intellectual progenitors, the structural linguists who attempted to describe language without reference to meaning. This is not to say that there are not important differences between the stance

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of the structuralists and the position of Chomsky on this issue. Chomsky rightly objected to the structuralist dictum that grammatical analysis should be done without reference to meaning. He rightly criticized the anti-mentalistic attitude of the Bloomfieldian linguists. In a reaction to this, the transformationalists, among whom Chomsky is pre-eminent, dropped the structuralist preoccupation with the language of a corpus and attempted to tap native speaker intuition. This in itself is an obvious effort to utilize meaning in linguistic analysis. But, nevertheless, like the structuralists they believed that grammatical regularities in a language could be described before semantic regularities were adequately studied. Now, this particular construct is being challenged by a group of transformational grammarians whose budding discipline has come to be known as generative semantics. In this discipline, according to George Lakoff (1971:287), "there is no clear distinction between syntactic phenomena and semantic phenomena." Thus, these grammarians are operating on the belief that the Chomskyan notion of deep structure which permitted transformational grammarians to maintain the independence of grammar is no longer valid. For this reason, Lakoff in a well-known paper (1968) has maintained that George cut the salami with a knife and George used a knife to cut the salami must be derived from the same semantic source regardless of how different their surface structures may be. In this manner, the generative semanticists have pointed out that there are certain apparently insoluble problems involved in the Chomskyan approach

to grammatical analysis. They have therefore opted for a system in which semantic structures are mapped into surface structures by transformations without any intervening level of deep structure. As far as the generative semanticists are concerned, some sort of meaning analysis has to be done before the grammar of a language can be established.

At this point, the question can quite legitimately be raised: What does all this have to do with dialect geography? There is of course no intrinsic relationship between generative semantics and dialect geography. But it is to be hoped that there is an extrinsic relationship which should be exploited to the fullest because contemporary transformational grammarians have too easily ignored the work of the dialectologist and they have been too readily satisfied with what might be called armchair evidence. Because linguists have shifted their attention from the study of a corpus of written or spoken language to the study of native speaker intuition, each linguist can prove whatever he likes supported by an appeal to intuitive evidence from his own dialect. As a result, nothing can be proved in any definitive sense of the term. It is for this reason that Dwight Bolinger complains about the "spur-of-the-moment evidence" of transformational grammarians and he points out that until 1967 the <u>some</u>-<u>any</u> rules required that the following two sentences be marked ungrammatical:

(1) *Anybody would be a fool to say that.

(2) *Anything like that rarely appeals to me. (1968:34)

Thus also John Robert Ross (1970:234) marks the following sentence as ungrammatical, or at least, semi-grammatical:

(3) ?*I am lurking in a culvert.

Similarly, Postal marks the first of the following sentences grammatical and the second as ungrammatical:

(4) To whom was the fact that Billy kissed Greta disgusting?

(5) *To whom was it disgusting that Billy kissed Greta?(1971:210)

To this observer, both of the last two sentences are equally grammatical or ungrammatical. But the point is this: there is no way of deciding in a non-arbitrary manner whether data adduced to support complex generalizations is either valid or suspect. It is this that prompts the dialectologist William Labov to state: "It is now evident that the search for homogeneity in intuitive judgments is a failure" (1971:162). It is at this point that the dialectologist with his hard evidence should come in and it is therefore to be hoped that the grammarians working from the viewpoint of generative semantics will exploit more fully the extrinsic relationship between dialect geography and grammatical studies. To be more explicit, the grammarian must find his evidence somewhere whether it be in literary texts as it has been in the less recent past or in intuitive judgments of the grammaticality of sentences as it is now or in the

spoken corpuses of the structural linguist and the dialect geographer. Because of the failure attendant on basing theory on the "quicksand of taste" as Carterette puts it (1965:229), it should be hoped that generative semanticists and dialect geographers should join hands in a common endeavor. The latter would provide the evidence for the former in their search for a viable linguistic theory. Dialect geographers have proved themselves masters at accumulating data. The lessons that they have learned could well be passed on to those who are engaged in the latest form of grammatical studies.

The question then might be asked: If the generative semanticist as a grammarian decides to look into dialect geography as a source of evidence, what are the kinds of things that he might be expected to find? In answering this question, the assumption must first be made that the generative semanticist is interested in bringing together constructions of various types which have the same meaning and from this point postulating the existence of a similarity of deep semantic structuring as in the Lakoff 1968-paper. With this in mind, the generative semanticist as a grammarian will find phenomena which must be incorporated into the model of analysis and which may cause revisions in the over-all theory. For instance, questions used to elicit the time of day include the following:

What time is it?	What time of day is it?
What time are you?	What time be you?
What time have you got?	What time has it got to be?

What time is it getting to be? What is the time?

What is your time? What is the hour? (LANE I, p. 79)

These questions which presumably all mean the same vary in structure and the use of particular lexical items from the straightforward What time is it? to the indirect What time are you? To go from What time is it? to What time of day is it? requires dome kind of lexical insertion, a simple enough operation. But it is difficult to see how the grammarian is going to get from the semantic primes underlying What time is it? to What time are you? Similarly, it may prove to be a problem to link What time have you got? to What time is it? since the have got verb is used in other sentences to express simple possession. It is not used for a simple equation as it seems to be here. Another example of this is in the map on page 521, volume III of the Linguistic Atlas of New England, where there are twenty-three synonymous expressions for He died. Included among these twenty-three expressions is one which has only an intransitive verb: He croaked. There are thirteen that are composed of verb plus particle sequences such as: He cashed in, He got through, He pegged out, He passed out or He passed away, He kicked off, He kicked out or He kicked up, He checked out or He checked in, He dropped out or He dropped away and He stepped out. Finally, there are at least seven which are composed of verb plus nominal expression such as: He passed in his checks, He passed in his chips, He cashed in his checks, He turned up his toes or He turned his toes up, He went west and He hopped a twig. Now the problem is this: if related sentences

such as George cut the salami with a knife and George used a knife to cut the salami are going to be treated as being the same on the abstract level of deep or semantic structure, should not all the various expressions for he died be treated the same way? And yet, are there not fine stylistic differences between He died, He kicked the bucket and He hopped a twig? Should these differences be ignored? Admittedly, all of the expressions for He died could conceivably be related to each other. This set of evidence merely requires that the semantic units be mapped into three structures: (1) a subject plus an intransitive verb, (2) a subject, verb and a particle or (3) a subject verb and a nominal object.

Not all of the structures which may have the same deep structure, taken from the atlas, could be mapped so simply from a deep structure to a surface structure. There is, for instance, an interesting inversion on page 100 of volume I of the Linguistic Atlas. Here the verb come is shifted before its subject where it replaces the adverbial particle when: We'll butcher the pig come cooler weather is matched with We'll butcher the pig when cooler weather comes. Sometimes, as in the Lakoff example, a second verbal is needed to pair with a surface sentence that has only one verbal. Thus, It's time to mug up has the same meaning although it does not have the same structure as It's time for a snack. (LANE, II, p. 314)

Another type of problematic structure, unearthed by dialect geographers, which will have to be described by the generative semanticist, is that in which a single surface representation has two

possible semantic interpretations. Thus, in the Linguistic Atlas there are sentences such as He takes after his father (Vol. II, p. 395) which can mean that he resembles his father in appearance or it can mean that he behaves in a manner similar to that of his father. This kind of sentence is slightly different than the kind of ambiguous sentence such as the shooting of the hunters . . . which so concerned earlier transformationalists. In the sentence, He takes after his father the ambiguity resides in the lexical unit takes after.

Not only will the generative semanticists have to deal with a kind of ambiguity not generally treated by the transformational grammarians, they will also have to deal with many cases of synonymity or partial synonymity that the dialect geographers have discovered. Thus some attempt will have to be made to describe the fact that:

> "Six informants use stone and rock without distinction. . . but twenty-one state that a rock is always larger than a stone . . . Nine informants describe a rock as too large and heavy to throw . . . Only one informant says that a rock is of normal size while a stone is too small to throw." (LANE, Vol. I, p. 35)

Quite apart from the fact that the above illustrates a problem now coming into focus, the problem of differing intuitions on the part of differing informants, it is to be expected that information such as the above will aid the newest of the grammarians in describing the grammaticality of some sentences and the ungrammaticality of others such as:

(1) He heaved the rock over the side.

(2) *He heaved the stone over the side.

Similarly, the generative semanticist will have to consider phenomena such as the following from the dialect geographer:

> "Most informants do not distinguish in meaning between sunset and sundown; but some use the latter term only in adverbial phrases of time (until sundown, after sundown, from sundown to dark) and some apply sunset only to the phenomenon (look at the sunset, a fine sunset) (LANE, Vol. I, p. 74).

Evidence such as this at once supports the generative semanticist's position and offers him new evidence to include in his grammar. It would appear that whatever semantic features differentiate sunset from sundown also create the difference in distribution so that sundown is used in adverbial expressions whereas sunset is not.

This kind of distinction also is made in the use of the phrases a long way or a long ways and a great ways. As the field-workers for the Linguistic Atlas have pointed out "The phrase a great ways was usually recorded with a negative" in phrases such as It ain't a great ways and It's not a very great ways. (LANE, Vol. 1, pp. 50-1) The atlas then adds another dimension to the problem by pointing out that "A few informants distinguish in their usage between way and ways using the former when the word is at the end of a phrase but the latter when it is followed by an adverb especially if the adverb begins with a vowel." (LANE, Vol. 1, pp. 50-1)

This latter phenomenon seems to contradict the generative semanticist's assumption that meaning determined distribution. It seems to be a case of phonological conditioning. Another such case might be the use of them cabbage versus those cabbages or what a lot of cabbage where the use or non-use of the plural seems to be quite idiosyncratic. (LANE, Vol. II, p. 255)

In any case, it has been the purpose of this brief discussion to point out that (1) the newest grammarians should not be content with mere armchair evidence, (2) the evidence in the work of the dialect geographers needs to be taken into account, and (3) there are many differing linguistic phenomena which the generative semanticists will have to consider in their analysis of English.

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